

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark brown color, framing the central text.

Carousel

orphan_account

Carousel by orphan_account

Category: IT (1990), IT (2017)

Genre: 1990 Pennywise, 2017 Pennywise, Age Difference, Alternate Universe - 1950s, Alternate Universe - Circus, Alternate Universe - Human, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Babies, Best Friends, Bill Skarsgard - Freeform, Blood Kink, Bullying, Car Sex, Child Neglect, Childhood Friends, Childhood Memories, Childhood Sweethearts, Circus, Clowns, Coming of Age, Corporal Punishment, Cunnilingus, Daddy Kink, Daddywise, Derry Sucks, Dirty Talk, Domestic Fluff, Dysfunctional Family, F/M, Family Drama, Family Dynamics, Father-Son Relationship, Fatherhood, First Kiss, First Time, First Time Blow Jobs, Growing Up, Heavy Petting, Human Pennywise (IT), Impregnation, Jealousy, Leaving Home, Loss of Virginity, Love Confessions, Love Triangles, Married Life, My Funny Valentine AU, One Shot, POV Female Character, Penis In Vagina Sex, Period-Typical Racism, Period-Typical Sexism, Pet Names, Possessive Behavior, Pregnancy, Racism, Racist Language, Sexual Tension, Smoking, Sugar Daddy, Teasing, Tim Curry - Freeform, Time Skips, Underage Smoking, Unhealthy Relationships, Unrequited Love, Vaginal Fingering, Vaginal Sex, Virginity or Celibacy Kink, Wedding Night, Weddings

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Georgie Denbrough, Henry Bowers, Henry Bowers's Gang (IT), Mike Hanlon, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris, The Losers Club (IT)

Relationships: Pennywise (IT)/Reader

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-10-31

Updated: 2017-10-30

Packaged: 2020-01-29 16:15:10

Rating: Explicit

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 8

Words: 9,438

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

1950s AU.

Human!Pennywise.

1990!Pennywise/Reader.

2017!Pennywise/Reader.

The circus rolls into Derry twice-yearly. As a child, you were fascinated by Robert Gray, also known as Pennywise the Dancing Clown, the owner and head-clown of the circus. You never failed to turn up when the circus came to town, and you made fast friends with his son, a half-feral boy called Junior.

You leave Derry aged sixteen, when your father takes a job in Chicago, but you never forget the clowns. Returning to your hometown as a young woman, you reunite with the Grays when the circus comes back...but things are a little different now.

You never expected to marry your childhood crush.

You never expected his son to declare his love for you, on the morning of your wedding.

Yeah. Things are a little different now.

1. June 1958

Author's Note:

- For [Mualhani](#), [Beastlybfs](#), [DJSpidersGeorg](#), [LuckyRedBalloon](#), [hotrockcandy](#), [nounouse](#).

Hey all, me again...

Taking a break from the 'My Funny Valentine' series to drop this little AU one-shot into the mix.

I did mention that I was planning this AU, in an earlier note, but I wasn't planning to write it until I'd finished with the 'official' stuff. I saw a picture comparison of Bill and a young Tim and the resemblance is quite uncanny, so a plot-bunny reared its ugly head and this trashy mess is the result. It's pretty shit and horrendously OOC, but I kinda like it.

Reader is the same 'you' from the other stories, but this one is set in the 1950s and the clowns are human. They're still clowns though, because they run a circus together as a father/son team. And they're still weird assholes.

More to come soon...

Recommended Playlist;

Off to the Races ~ Lana Del Rey

Diet Mountain Dew ~ Lana Del Rey

Teenage Dream ~ Katy Perry

Sweet Sixteen ~ Billy Idol

White Wedding ~ Billy Idol

Gloomy Sunday ~ Billie Holliday

Bye-Bye Blackbird ~ Julie London

Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean ~ Ruth Brown

Baby, Let's Play House ~ Elvis Presley

Be a Jumping-Jack ~ Betty Hutton & James Stewart
Tutti Frutti ~ Little Richard
Somewhere Over the Rainbow ~ Judy Garland
Stuck in the Middle With You ~ Stealers Wheel
American Pie ~ Don McLean
The Carny ~ Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds
Read My Mind ~ The Killers
Primadonna Girl ~ Marina & the Diamonds
Home is Wherever I'm With You ~ Edward Sharpe &
the Magnetic Zeros
Carousel ~ Melanie Martinez

June 1958

You had always wanted to be a June bride.

It's raining when your mother laces you into your wedding dress, but you don't let it dampen your spirits. It's a beautiful day, despite the weather, because you're getting married, you're *actually* getting *married*, to the only man you've ever wanted.

"Mrs Gray."

You murmur the words aloud, smiling beatifically at your reflection, and your sister rolls her eyes, reaching up to secure the pins holding your hair in place.

"Mrs Robert Gray."

"Geez, {y/n}." Bev giggles from under the voluminous skirts of your gown, where she is sliding a blue lace garter over the curve of your thigh, "You're *really* in love with him, aren't you?"

"Head over heels." Your sister flutters her eyelashes, smirking at you, "Crazy for the clown."

Your mother snorts, "Well, I should *hope* so. She's marrying him, after all."

You know that your parents don't really approve of Bob. He's a lot older than you and he's not respectable. He's bold and he's flashy, and he spends most of his time wearing white face-paint and a bright

red wig, turning cart-wheels in the ring.

“An entertainer.” Your mother had sniffed, when you had finally plucked up the courage to show off your engagement ring, “And after that nice doctor seemed so keen on you, {y/n}.”

Entertainer.

That’s a polite way of saying *charlatan*, in the parlance of your family.

Charlatan.

Scoundrel.

Rogue.

Oh yes, he’s a rogue, all right.

You think of his eyes, his smile, and you remember that night in his car; the way his hands had grasped at your knee, your thigh, and then slipped beneath the hem of your skirt...

And tonight...

Oh, tonight!

Your face must have changed, because your mother is clicking her tongue at you, her eyes bright with secret knowledge.

“I had that same look on the day I married your father. Couldn’t wait for it all to be over, so that we could be alone.”

“Mom!” Your sister is aghast, “Eww!”

You chuckle, ushering them away, eager to be free of their busy hands. They’ve been squawking and flapping around you like a flock of hens all morning, suffocating you with attention. There has been so much to do, and so little time, but you’re ready now.

You’re more than ready.

Bev finally emerges from beneath your dress, smiling up at you.

“You’re gonna knock ‘em dead, {y/n}.”

“Yeah?”

You stand before the mirror, turning this way and that, in a flurry of white satin. The dress is simple and elegant, with a deep sweetheart neckline and lace sleeves. A dainty pearl necklace curls around your throat, warmed by your skin, and you have the tiny earrings to match it. The set belongs to your mother, but she had offered it to you in the spirit of tradition; *something borrowed*. The lace gloves are *new*, the garter is *blue*, and the antique brooch pinned to your breast is *old*; a Gray family heirloom, apparently. Two hundred years old, if Bob’s tales are to be believed.

Your hair is swept up into a chignon, secured by a dozen pins, and the tulle veil drifts over it all, like a fine mist over water. Bev had fixed your makeup for you earlier, and she had fixed it again when you had started crying, stunned by the first glimpse of your own reflection. Your lips are pink, like the roses in your bouquet.

Pink roses, peonies, and lily of the valley.

There’s a knock at the door. Your mother answers it, murmuring something, and then she turns to you, “It’s Junior. Should I get rid of him?”

You smile, “He can come in, Mom. It’s okay.”

She gives you a disapproving look, but she doesn’t say anything, and your unexpected visitor peers into the room, his face taut and apprehensive.

And then he catches sight of you, in your bridal finery, and his eyes light up.

His strange eyes, wide and pale-green, prone to wandering and staring and not blinking for minutes at a time.

Junior takes a tentative step towards you, as though he’s afraid that you might shatter into a million pieces if he makes a wrong move. As always, he looks ill at-ease in his clothes. Tall and thin, like a kid wearing a grown man’s formal suit, his wrists protruding from the

cuffs of his jacket. His dark hair is slicked back, his shoes are freshly shined, and there is an orange carnation in his button-hole.

Junior.

As children, he was a sudden spark in the summers of your youth. It was as though he brought the sun with him, when the circus rolled into Derry. He was your Heathcliff, your Romeo, all gangling limbs and moody eyes. The fearless feral child, terrorising the streets of your hometown.

Junior; sometimes your enemy and the bane of your life, always your friend and your unlikely white knight.

And once, just once, in a hazy blur of colour and nervous laughter, he was your first kiss.

And now...

He is your fiancé's only child, his heir.

Your future step-son.

Junior does not speak.

You're waiting for him to say something, to say *anything*, but he just stands there, looking at you.

A flash of irritation mars your brow and you turn away, looking into the mirror again, "Can we have a moment, please?"

Your mother purses her lips, looking rather put-out, but she catches hold of Bev and your sister and shoos them from the room, and then you're alone with Junior, still waiting for him to speak.

He doesn't.

Eventually you let out an impatient huff, planting your hands upon your hips, "Well? How do I look?"

"Pretty. You *always* look pretty, {y/n}." Scowling, Junior drops his gaze to his feet, scuffing his dress-shoes across the floor, "You should wear your hair down, though."

Still preoccupied with the mirror, you wrinkle your nose at him, adjusting your veil, “You think so? Bob likes my hair up.”

“So I can kiss your neck, baby.”

You allow yourself a secretive smile, remembering the feeling of his lips against your skin.

Junior snorts, rolling his eyes, “Well, Pop’s old-fashioned that way, I guess.” He moves to stand behind you, placing his long hands upon your shoulders, “You look like a *girl*, {y/n}. A *pretty* girl. *Woman*, I mean. It’s weird.”

You smirk at him, watching his reflection, “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He holds your gaze for a long moment, in the glass, and then he pulls away, his full mouth twisting down.

“Hey.” You grab at his elbow, drawing him back towards you, “Hey, what’s wrong?”

Junior shrugs, “Everything. Everything’s wrong, {y/n}.” He reaches up to brush a stray tendril of hair from your brow, his peculiar eyes flickering across your face, “You sure you’re making the right decision, wild-cat? It’s not too late to change your mind.”

Wild-cat.

He hasn’t called you that in years.

Not since you were kids.

You frown up at him, “What? Why would I change my mind? This is the happiest day of my life, Junior.”

His fingers circle your wrists, thumbs brushing against your veins, “You should be with me, {y/n}. You should be marrying *me*, not some washed-up old man.”

What? What the hell? Where did that come from?

You don't understand.

What the fuck is he talking about?

Swallowing nervously, you manage a teasing smile and shake your head, pretending to scold him, "Hey, don't talk about your father that way, you brat."

It doesn't go down well.

Junior flinches, as though you have slapped him, and he releases his grip upon you. He snorts, running a long hand through his hair, "Geez. You sound like my mother."

"Well, I'm not." You sigh, trying to maintain your composure. You can't afford to freak out, today of all days. You have to stay cool. Catching him by the hand, you smile up at him, "I'm not your mother. I'm your *friend*, Junior, but that's all I can ever be."

"But why?"

Ugh. He sounds like a petulant child.

Resisting the urge to punch him, you thread your fingers through his, keeping your tone calm and patient, "Because I'm in love with your dad, Junior. I've *always* loved him."

"And I've always loved you, {y/n}." Junior's voice is strident, urgent, but there is a bright pain beneath it all, "You *know* I have. Remember what I told you, the year you left town? I said that I'd never look at another girl if I couldn't have you, and then you kissed me...you *kissed* me, remember?"

You shake your head again, squeezing his fingers, "We were kids, Junior. Stupid kids, fooling around. It didn't mean anything."

He pulls away, his green eyes wide with hurt and dark with fury, "Well, it did to me. It meant the *world* to me, {y/n}."

"Oh, Junior..."

Another knock at the door saves you, sparing you the torture of

rejecting him again.

It's your father, smart and proud in his new suit.

"You look...oh, you look *perfect*, {y/n}. Absolutely perfect."

His voice is rough with unshed tears and it almost starts you off again, but you manage to hold it together, not wanting to ruin your makeup.

"You ready? The girls are waiting outside."

Your father holds out his arm to you, and you take it, with a tremulous smile.

"I'll see you at the chapel, {y/n}." Junior slinks past you, keeping his head down, "Good luck."

You want to run after him, to hold him, but you can't do it. You let him go.

"Yes, I'm ready."

It's still raining outside, but the sun is shining, breaking through the clouds.

It's a beautiful day.

2. August 1941

August 1941

The Gray family circus has been coming to Derry for thirty years. Twice-yearly in spring and summer, staying in town for a month at a time, and you've never missed it. Your first real memory of it, your *own* memory rather than anything influenced by your parents' stories, is seeing balloons, red balloons floating over your head, into the sun.

You are six years old, you're wearing a plaid smock-dress and a bow in your hair, clutching at your father's hand, with the crowd surging around you.

And then you're lost, crying, wandering through the mass of people. You know them all, but they're too excited to notice you, and you want to find your parents.

You want to go home.

The air is alive with music, with the smell of popcorn and smoke, but you just want to go home.

"Hey, princess."

The clown catches you by the hand, his gloved fingers swallowing your tiny palm, and he kneels beside you, his blue eyes crinkling at the corners.

He's so *big*, so big and *bright*, with red lips and a white face.

You're frightened at first, frightened of this colourful creature, but then he *smiles* at you.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?"

You shuffle your feet, hiccupping through the tears, "I'm not s-supposed to talk to s-strangers."

"Well now, that's awful smart of you, princess. Your daddy must be real proud of you, huh?" The clown chuckles, lowering his voice into

a conspiratorial whisper, “Better introduce myself, then. I’m Pennywise, the Dancing Clown, and you’re...well, you’re {y/n}, aren’t you? Yeah! See, we’re not strangers at all, are we? Now, let’s see if we can turn that frown upside down...”

He tweaks your nose between his fingers.

Winks at you.

You giggle, tears forgotten.

“Atta girl. C’mon, let’s go find your folks. Bet they’re worried about you...”

Pennywise gathers you into his arms, holding you close, and you bury your face into his silk front.

Safe and sound.

3. May 1947

May 1947

You're twelve when you first meet Junior.

Almost twelve, all coltish and ungainly, and he has just turned thirteen.

The war is over, the circus is in town, and the world is yours for the taking.

You've seen him around before, the clown's boy, but you have never spoken to him. In truth, you're a little afraid of him, because of what the grown-ups say.

Feral child.

Circus brat.

Stay away from him.

He lives up to his reputation, lashes out against it, against the sting of loneliness and rejection. He steals and scraps, spits and swears, sprays paint on the walls of the library and the school. The last one lands him in deep shit with his father. Pennywise, *Mr Gray*, doesn't usually pay much attention to Junior's antics, but he gives the poor kid a good lick with his belt after the spray paint incident.

"Derry-folk are our neighbours, boy. They're our bread and butter. So, I don't wanna hear that you've been makin' a nuisance of yourself, or I'll tan your ass in front of the whole town. You won't be able to sit for a week, you hear me?"

Junior is sulking at the Barrens, nursing his wounded pride, when you come running through the foliage, screaming blue murder, with Henry Bowers and his gang hot on your heels. Bowers, the little hoodlum, has been gunning for you and your friends since *forever*, but he's been even worse since Richie decided to dump a full cup of soda over his head during a horror matinee at the Paramount.

That had been a week ago, but the bullies won't let up, not until they've caught every single one of you.

Not until you're bruised and bleeding, begging for mercy under Henry Bowers' boot.

Oh, you're gonna kill Richie when you see him!

Panting hard, you crash over an overgrown verge and trip over Junior, who is sprawled on the grass, smoking a cigarette.

"Hey!" He rolls away, cursing, "Watch where you're goin', kid!"

"Sorry!" You manage to gasp, clutching your ribs, "Sorry, I didn't see you..."

"Where'd she go?"

"Shit!" You duck, dragging Junior down into the long grass, just as Henry and his goons come into view, "Oh shit, I'm dead meat!"

Junior rolls his eyes, "You're scared of that guy? Pfft."

"You don't understand. He's bad news." You shake your head, "He's *real* bad news."

The circus brat smirks, exposing a shallow gap between his front teeth, "Yeah? Well, so am I."

He stands, ignoring your frantic hands pulling at his shirt, and he saunters over to Henry, cigarette bobbing between his teeth.

Shit.

You put your hands over your eyes.

Oh man, he's gonna die.

A jaunty greeting, from Junior.

Muffled insults, from Henry.

And then...

SMACK.

You peer out from between your fingers.

Henry is reeling, his hands flying up to his face. His nose is spraying blood, like a seltzer hose.

Junior slowly makes his way back to you, grimacing and flexing his fingers. Behind him, Henry and his goons are regrouping, yelling threats and posturing. Junior grabs your arm, dragging you up, and you both run for it, hand in hand, laughing hysterically.

Finally, you make it to the clubhouse. Your friends are there, huddled around a mottled collection of purloined porno-magazines. The feral kid falls silent, hanging back, but you push him forward, smiling proudly, "This is Junior."

The others stare at him; Bevvie, Bill, Eddie, Stan, Ben, Mike, and Richie.

"This is Junior." You repeat firmly, moving to stand beside him, "He's a loser, too."

"I know him." Bill says, venturing a smile, "The circus kid, right?"

Eddie eyes the newcomer closely, "My mom told me to stay away from him."

Richie chortles, "Your mom should stay away from cheeseburgers, Eddie."

"He doesn't look like a loser." Ben pipes up, "He looks cool."

You roll your eyes, "He's an outsider. He doesn't have any friends and nobody wants him around."

The others stay silent, staring at Junior, who shifts uncomfortably on the spot.

"And he punched Henry Bowers." You add, after a long moment, your voice carefully nonchalant, "Punched him right in the nose."

All at once, the clubhouse *erupts*.

Cheers and laughter, Richie pounding the ground with a fist and swearing triumphantly, “Fuck yes!”

“Oh, I like you!”

“Yeah, you’re in!”

They move as one, coming to pet the newcomer, to inspect him and congratulate him. Bill grins, taking Junior’s hand and shaking it.

“W-welcome to the Losers’ Club, k-kid.”

4. May 1951

May 1951

Three days after your sixteenth birthday, your father drops a bombshell on your narrow little world; the publishing company he's worked for all of your life is expanding, and he has been offered a regional manager's position in one of the new offices.

In Chicago.

He wants to talk about it, as a family, but you don't know why. Your parents have already made the decision. The house, your childhood home, is to be rented out, in your absence. The arrangements have been made; new house, new school, new life.

In Chicago.

Your sister is excited. She's too young to understand, really. You push away from the kitchen table, your lips tight, and then you're *running*, running out of the room, out of the *house*, with your father's voice ringing after you.

You don't know where you're going. You don't care.

You just keep running, until you finally reach the outskirts of town, where the circus is waiting, unfurled like a gaudy flag, as far as your eyes can see. It's the last week of its spring visit, until it returns to Derry in the summer.

And when it returns, you won't be here.

You'll be in Chicago.

You wander through the tents and games, the stalls and exhibitions, drinking it all in. Losing yourself in the sounds, the colours, the *smell* of it. So alien and obscene, to your small-town sensibilities, and yet so familiar.

"Hey, princess."

Oh, that voice.

That rough voice, with its faint Bronx inflection. Husky and rasping, smooth and low.

Princess.

Never fails to set your knees to trembling, hearing him say it.

Heart fluttering, you turn, a shy smile tilting at the corners of your mouth, and you make your way over to the nearest tent. Just outside of it, Robert Gray is lounging in a deckchair, smoking a cigar. He's wearing a vest and slacks, and his feet are bare, but he's wearing white gloves and his face is already made-up for the next show.

White face, blue and black shadows around his eyes, red lips, red nose, and that ridiculous bright red wig, standing up in wild tufts around his head.

You press a light kiss against his jawline, smiling fondly when he grumbles and swats at you.

"C'mon now, don't smudge the paint, {y/n}. Takes the best part of an afternoon to get me lookin' this good."

You roll your eyes and flop onto the grass at his feet, crossing your legs and resting your chin in your hands, "You seen Junior? We've got plans."

The clown shrugs, sprinkling ash with every little movement, "Yeah, he's around here somewhere. Gonna have to hang some bells on that kid, I reckon. Might be the only way to keep track of him."

You laugh, "He'd probably hang them on a cat or something, just to mess with you."

"Yeah, that's Junior." Bob snorts, flicking the spent cigar into the ashtray at his elbow, "Always givin' me the slip. Never around when there's a rehearsal, or chores to be done." He smiles at you, ruffling your hair with a gloved hand, "Or pretty girls callin' on him."

He thinks I'm pretty?

Me?

Your heart is almost pounding out of your chest. You can't look at him. You feel like you'll *die* if you look at him.

Bob doesn't seem to notice your awkwardness. Or if he has, then he's too discrete to say anything. It's nothing out of the ordinary, really; you're at that peculiar age when a compliment can send you into a paroxysm of youthful mortification.

The silence draws out, but it's a good silence, comfortable and soothing. You've been a regular fixture down here, along with the rest of the Losers' Club, ever since the fateful day that Junior had broken Henry Bowers' nose. What kid wouldn't want to hang around the circus every-day? Bob is easy-going, in comparison to the other adults in town, and he has never seemed to mind you hanging around. You would gorge yourselves on free popcorn and hot-dogs, kicking back in the empty risers, under the dome of the big-top, watching the performers in rehearsal. Junior is often too busy to join you, running around on errands for his father, or practising his act; he'll make a damn fine clown, one day, or an acrobat or a trapeze artist, if he sticks to his training.

Still, you've probably spent more time down here than the rest of the gang. Sometimes, once the others have drifted away, you'll muck in with the rest, handing out props and helping out with costumes and make-up. You even stayed over one night, listening to the radio and drinking hot chocolate with Junior, when your parents thought you were at Bev's house.

Not that they approve of Bev, exactly, but they'd pitch a fit if they knew how much time you spent at the circus.

You sigh wistfully, remembering that night. Junior had filched a couple of his father's cigars and the pair of you had been green in the face by the end of them, coughing and heaving, and laughing despite it all. And then you had puked on the grass outside and Bob had rolled his eyes, "I am not cleanin' that up."

You sigh again, stretching out in front of the tent, and Bob finally takes the bait, "Come on, {y/n}. Are you gonna tell me what's eating

you, or do I have to guess?”

“My dad is moving us to Chicago, at the end of the month.” You roll over onto your stomach, running your fingers through the trampled grass, “I don’t want to go. I mean, yeah, Derry is a shithole, but all my friends are here. My school is here. And...and it means that I won’t be here when you guys come back, in summer. I don’t wanna leave.”

Bob leans forward and plants his hands upon his knees, wincing as his joints pop, “That’s a shame, princess. Junior’s real fond of you. I think you’re the first real pal that he’s ever had, y’know.”

“Yeah.” You shrug nonchalantly, pushing yourself up, “Geez, I dunno how I’m going to tell him...”

“He’ll get over it. He’s a tough kid.” Bob pats your shoulder, his hand moving across your skin in gentle circles, “It’s a real shame, though. I was gettin’ used to havin’ you around.”

You have the sudden urge to do something reckless, something crazy and stupid. You want to touch the clown, you want to kiss him and beg him to let you stay.

He could...

He could marry you.

He would have to ask permission from your parents, because you’re under eighteen, but it could work...

And then you wouldn’t have to go to Chicago.

You could stay with the circus, and come back to Derry twice a year, to see your friends.

And...and you would be his wife. Bob’s wife.

You would belong to him.

You swallow, half-twisting to look down at him, the question ready upon your parted lips.

But Junior is coming, waving at you, with that dopey grin on his face. Bob smiles, ushering you away, “Go on, princess. Get out of here.”

You head down to the Barrens, arm in arm with Junior. He’s complaining about something, but you’re only half-listening and he eventually falls silent, guessing that something isn’t right. The rest of the gang are already at the clubhouse, smoking and ribbing each other. You manage to hold it together and join in, not wanting to spoil it. Junior is sullen, though. There’s a palpable tension in the air, between the two of you, but the others are smart enough to keep their mouths shut.

Finally, the others start to disperse, one by one, until you’re alone with Junior. He slides out of the clubhouse, dropping to the ground, and extends a hand to help you down. You walk through the dense wilderness, to a grassy knoll beside the stream, and he lights a cigarette, reclining against your knees.

“So...” Junior blows a smoke-ring, his green eyes moving pensively over your face, “You wanna tell me what’s happened, wild-cat? Or are you just gonna sit there and pout all afternoon?”

Wild-cat.

He’d given you that nickname after the rock fight.

Last summer, Henry Bowers and his gang had caught you all down by the old quarry. Henry had insulted Mike, had called him a *nigger*, and Bev had thrown a stone at him, her pale face taut with fury.

And then you had all joined in, hurling rocks and stones across the divide, until the bullies had finally retreated, with bruised skin and bruised egos.

The others had been screaming and swearing the whole time, but you hadn’t said a word. You had just *hissed*, like a wild-cat, and the name stuck.

Smiling at the memory, you reach down to draw your finger through Junior’s dark hair. You’re at a loss for words. You don’t know how to

say it, so you take a deep breath and plunge in, turning your eyes up to the blue sky.

“I’m leaving Derry, at the end of the month. We’re moving to Chicago.”

Junior stiffens beneath your touch, “What the fuck, {y/n}? Why?”

“Grown up stuff.” You don’t have the energy to explain, “I don’t have a choice.”

“Shit.” Junior growls, turning over to look at you, “You can’t go, wild-cat. What about me?”

You snort, “Like I said, I don’t have a choice. Listen, don’t tell the others. Okay? I don’t want anything to change. Not yet.”

“Neither do I, {y/n}.” Junior flops back into the grass, dragging you down with him. It’s quiet for a while, nothing but bird-song and the crickets. You take the cigarette, drawing smoke into your lungs. His breath is warm against the curve of your cheek. You turn your head, surprised at how close he is, with the tip of his nose almost touching yours. He sighs heavily, his fingers twining around your wrist, “I love you, wild-cat.”

You smile, poking your tongue out at him, “Love you too, brat.”

And then he’s moving even closer, until your vision is filled by him, his face blotting out the sun and the sky. He brushes his lips against your cheek, against your mouth.

Kissing you.

Your first kiss.

Soft and sweet, and unbearably tender.

His lips trembling against yours, with youthful uncertainty and longing.

When he finally draws away, after an eternity or longer, you can only stare up at him, into his wide eyes. He takes the cigarette from between your fingers, dragging upon it with fitful elegance, “I love

you, {y/n}. Only you, forever and ever. No one else.”

You don't know what to say.

You can't speak, so you laugh instead, and pull him down into another kiss.

5. August 1956

August 1956

Homecoming.

It's bittersweet.

You're a woman now, twenty-one years old. A woman, with breasts and hips, and a faint Midwestern twang to your voice. You've changed, but Derry hasn't, not really. There are new faces, amongst the old, but your childhood home is still there, waiting for its family to return.

Your parents unpack, your sister glowers miserably at her old bedroom, and you head into town. There's a shiny new diner, on the corner opposite the Paramount. The sign in the window says *Help Wanted* so you go inside and they take the sign down. Bev is working there, too. She throws her arms around you, with a joyous burst of laughter, and you smile, running your hands through her red hair.

The Losers' Club is a shadow of itself, but you're just glad to see some of the old gang. Bev is still here and so is Ben; he has lost weight and they're engaged. Eddie and Mike are both around too. Bill is living in New York, but you already knew that; your father's company had published his first novel, last fall. Bev points out his brother, little Georgie, not so little anymore. He's sitting in the corner with a milkshake and his arm around a sweet-faced girl. You can't believe how much he's grown.

Richie has moved away, and so has Stan, but the others come together to welcome you home. Down at the clubhouse, with lukewarm beer and cigarettes, you toast the Losers' Club and laugh and cry.

And so, you slot back into life, just as though you had never gone away. Your sister readjusts, after a while, and she soon replaces the sweet-faced girl in Georgie Denborough's arms, much to your surprise and amusement.

And then, in the first week of August, the circus rolls into Derry, right on schedule.

That first night, you head down to the big top with your family and friends, trying to ignore the butterflies flitting back and forth through your ribcage. The spotlight is shining down on a familiar face.

Pennywise, the Dancing Clown.

He hasn't changed, and neither have you.

You still want him.

Bev is sitting behind you, with the other Losers. She grips your shoulder, giggling into your ear, "Geez, you had the biggest crush on him, {y/n}."

You smile ruefully, dragging your eyes away from the clown, "Was it that obvious?"

She nods, smirking at you, "Mmhmm."

The show is a blur after that, until your sister claps her hands together like an excited child, pointing up at the trapeze.

Junior.

Junior, spiralling through the air.

Junior, in a pale clown-suit, with stiff lace frills and orange buttons.

He's turning on the rings, the muscles rippling in his toned limbs. His face is painted, white and red, and he has dyed his hair; it stands up from his head in a coppery quiff, like devil horns.

Your heart is in your mouth, watching him up there, and you clap until your palms are stinging.

Afterwards, you manage to sneak away from your party, heading into the maze of tents and stalls. Junior is standing beside the popcorn vendor. He's bare-chested, with a blue towel slung over his shoulders and a cigarette drooping from his lips.

“Hey brat, long time no see.”

He whirls around, his eyes wide, and then he is on you, in three long strides, and his hands are around your waist. He lifts you into the air and spins you around, singing your name, and then he sets you down, grinning like a fool.

“I knew you’d come back.”

You walk together, holding hands, talking about the good old days and everything that has happened since you last saw each other, and then you see Bob, sitting in his deckchair with a letter on his lap, and you’re struck dumb. He glances up at you, brow furrowed, lines cracking through the heavy make-up, and then he smiles, “Hey, princess.”

“Hey.” You drop Junior’s hand. He frowns at you, displeased by your sudden coolness, but you’re too far gone to notice, “I’m home.”

“Look at you.” The old clown’s eyes rake over you, taking you in from head to toe. He lets out a low whistle, “You’re all grown up.”

Over the next few weeks, you spend every spare minute down at the circus, just like old times.

Only it’s not.

Something has changed.

You and Junior are solid, the best of friends, but he’s always on edge, always looking at you. *Touching you.* He’ll brush his hand across yours, or slide an arm around your waist, his green eyes flickering covetously across your face and body.

You do your best to dissuade him, in the kindest possible way, but he keeps on at you, trying to chip away at your resolve.

He’s very busy, though. He’s started to take things seriously, for the first time since you’ve known him, and he’s always training, working hard to hone his act.

So you end up hanging around with Bob. He’s in charge of the whole

show, so he's even busier than Junior, but he always seems to have time for you.

Something has changed there, too.

The older man seems keenly aware of you, of what you have become, and there is a new tension there, an almost unbearable pull, magnetic and *scorching*.

He never touches you, though.

Not even accidentally.

It's like he's making a point not to touch you.

And you want him to touch you, oh yes, you want his hands on you...

Moving around the tent, you make an effort to look alluring, sliding across his lap to light his cigar and affecting a husky tone when you speak. You feel foolish, like a low-grade Marilyn Monroe, but you're determined to have him, to make him see you.

You're a woman now, not a little girl.

Not that crying child, lost in the crowd.

Not his son's best friend, beleaguered with acne spots and train-track braces.

It seems hopeless, but you can feel him caving, as the days roll by. One night, when you're sewing buttons onto a costume for Junior, you reach absently for the scissors and the damn things are just out of reach. You let out an exasperated sigh, tired and frustrated, but before you can move, Bob is sliding the scissors across the table towards your hand, his eyes still fixed upon the latest accounts figures spread out in front of him.

"There you go, babydoll."

You freeze, your fingers tensing against his, and he glances up at you, one eyebrow cocked, as though he's daring you to say something.

You don't say a word.

You drop your eyes to the material in your hands, smiling slightly.

Babydoll.

And just like that, you're not *princess* anymore.

You're babydoll.

Nothing happens, though. He doesn't touch you. And then the season is over, and the circus is on the move, leaving Derry behind until next spring. You sob, clinging to Junior, and he strokes your hair and murmurs softly, trying to comfort you. Bob is waiting in the truck, lounging behind the wheel, his cigar burning down to ashes in his white-knuckled grip.

His eyes are burning too.

Burning into you, burning *through* you, and setting you ablaze.

Junior pulls away, climbing into the passenger seat of the truck, and Bob swings down, moving to stand beside you. His hand curls around your wrist.

He brushes his lips against your ear and, right on cue, your legs turn to jelly.

"You're playin' with fire, babydoll." His voice is low and dangerous, shaking you to the core, "Gonna get your fingers burned, if you don't know when to quit."

You force steel into your spine, pulling back. Your mouth twists into a knowing smile, "See you next year, Daddy."

Bob smirks, already turning away, "That's my girl."

6. May 1957

May 1957

The months between then and now are long and torturous.

You feel like your life is on hold, like you're waiting, biding your time until the circus rolls back into town.

Staving off the throes of boredom and frustration, you go on a few dates, just to occupy your time and maintain an air of normalcy. To your surprise, Eddie asks you out, spewing out the words in a nervous muddle one afternoon, and you let him take you to the Paramount, your old childhood haunt.

You see *The Curse of Frankenstein*, and he holds your hand in the darkness, his warm fingers twitching against yours.

It's not right, though.

You both know it.

It's half-hearted and mechanical, and just plain *weird*. Eddie is like a little brother to you, and besides, you always had a sneaking suspicion that he was crushing on Richie, all those years ago.

Still, neither of you has the heart, or the guts, to end it.

When the circus returns, you sit together in the front row, holding hands and sharing popcorn. You can feel the clowns watching your every move. Junior looks positively furious, even from the heights of the trapeze, and Bob's eyes flash red fire when Eddie dares to slide a tentative arm around your shoulders, emboldened by the heady atmosphere.

After the show, you part ways and head home, walking quickly through town. You want to avoid any unpleasantness; Bob probably won't bother you, but Junior can't be trusted not to make a scene.

As you near your street, you hear a car in the distance, close behind you.

A truck.

You keep walking, your eyes fixed to the ground, and then the truck pulls up beside you.

“Get in, babydoll.”

Bob’s voice broaches no refusal. You know better than to argue, or to run. Sighing, you climb into the cab, sliding into the passenger seat, and he starts the engine. He doesn’t speak, not until you reach the outskirts of town, and then he pulls over, drumming his fingers upon the wheel.

It’s a deserted stretch of road, dark and lonely, and a sudden bolt of fear jolts through you.

You would have expected this of Junior, who has always been jealous and reckless, but Bob always seems so cool, so easy-going and reasonable. A man to be respected, yes. A man to be reckoned with, to be handled carefully, but you’ve never been afraid of him.

Not since you were a child, lost in the crowd, and he had loomed over you, big and bright and *loud*.

“I don’t get it, baby. I’m away for a couple of months and I come back to find you whorin’ yourself around town.”

You snort, your fear slowly ebbing away, “I’ve been a few dates, yeah. So what? You don’t want me, but plenty of other guys do, so why should I waste my time pining after you?”

Bob rolls his eyes, “Thought you were smart, baby. You really think that I don’t want you?”

You fold your arms and pout, like a petulant kid, “I don’t know.”

He chuckles, his blue eyes gleaming, “C’mere, doll. Climb up here and I’ll show you.” He pats his knee, opening his arms. You narrow your eyes, not sure what game he’s playing, but you can’t resist him for long. With an exasperated sigh, you move across, curling against his chest, your thighs stretched taut on either side of him.

He leans back, his eyes drifting lazily over you, his hands planted firmly upon your hips. Even now, after all these years, he's a handsome son of a bitch. Not striking, like his son, but he's got *something*, a *spark*, and he's only getting better with age.

Dark hair, greying at the temples. Broad shoulders and sinewy arms. A full mouth. High cheekbones.

And oh, those blue eyes of his, crinkling at the corners when he smiles at you.

Damn it, you'd even go wild for him in that ridiculous clown get-up, with the heavy make-up and the crazy wig.

"Now, you hold tight there, baby." Bob's hands move *down*, down to grasp at your knees, your thighs, and then they're sliding *up*, under your skirt. You're dimly aware that you're holding your breath, but you quickly let it out, in a ragged gasp, when his fingers slide beneath your crotch, rubbing gently against your cunt. He smirks, pressing hard, and you moan, arching into his touch, "Oh, you're so wet for me, doll. So wet and hot for Daddy."

You sink your teeth into your tongue, keening upon his lap. You want desperately to be free of your underwear, to feel his fingers sinking into your core, but he holds you fast, one hand still gripping at your thigh.

"Patience, baby." Bob croons softly, stroking the pad of his thumb across the damp lace between your legs, "Hmmm, your little panties are drenched, aren't they? Soaked through. You wanna take them off?"

You're dragging them down before he can change his mind, kicking them into the foot-well, and then his fingers are curling into you, deeper and deeper, until he meets that delicate push of resistance; the only thing keeping you from belonging to him, body and soul.

"Oho." He laughs delightedly, pulling his fingers free, even as your muscles clench around them, trying to hold onto them. You whine miserably, pawing at his shoulders, but he only smiles at you, clicking his tongue, "Such a needy little slut. Well, that's too bad,

doll, because we're gonna do this right, aren't we?"

Still lost in a haze of thwarted lust, you blink down at him, like a startled owl.

You don't understand.

Bob favours you with a patient smile, trailing his sticky fingers along the length of your thighs, "I'm gonna fuck you so hard, {y/n}. I'm gonna *ruin* you. But not just yet..." He grabs your hand, sliding it over his crotch, and you can feel his cock stirring heavily beneath your palm, growing thick and hard. You squeak at the sensation and Bob chuckles, squeezing your fingers around his length, "That's all for you, baby. Gonna give you every inch of it, just as soon as we're married."

His words take a long moment to register and then you let out another *squeak*, your heart skipping a beat, and you throw your arms around his neck, sprinkling kisses across his face.

"Okay, okay baby, that's enough." He brushes you away, smirking, and reaches behind you, into the glove compartment. He takes out a little box, blue and black velvet, and slips it into your hand, "Go on, open it."

A solitaire diamond winks up at you, sparkling prettily in the gloom.

"Holy shit!"

Beaming ecstatically, you immediately slide the ring onto your finger, bouncing up and down upon his lap.

Bob laughs, patting your backside, "That's a yes, then?" He grips your chin between finger and thumb, drawing your gaze back to him, "No more foolin' around, you hear me? You break it off with your little boyfriend right away, or I'll break his arms, and then I'll beat your little ass until you can't walk straight, let alone sit. Yeah?"

You roll your eyes, "Eddie is my friend. We were never serious."

"Eddie?" Bob groans, shaking his head in disbelief, "Not the kid with the inhaler? Geez, I thought I recognised the little puke. You're tellin'

me that you couldn't do any better than *him*, baby?"

"Don't be mean, Daddy." You swat at his shoulder playfully, "He's like family to me."

"Well then, best tell him that he's invited to a wedding." Bob's face darkens, his eyes fixed upon the ring, "And speakin' of family, I'll have to get hold of Junior before he gets hold of you. Don't want him findin' out before I've had a chance to butter him up."

"Oh." You hadn't thought about Junior. You just know that he isn't going to take this well. Taking one last good look at your ring, you take it off, slipping it back into the box, "I won't wear it until you've spoken to him."

Bob smiles, "Smart thinkin', babydoll. Now scoot over and I'll drive you home. Gotta make sure you get your beauty sleep."

"Gee, thanks."

You're smiling though.

You can't *stop* smiling.

Mrs Gray.

Mrs Robert Gray.

7. June 1958

June 1958

The wedding goes without a hitch, despite the rain and Junior's surliness, and you step out of the chapel as Mrs Robert Gray, hurling your bouquet into the crowd with a triumphant yell.

Your sister catches it and turns warm eyes upon Georgie Denbrough, who looks vaguely alarmed, much to the amusement of his older brother. The Losers' Club; they're all here, even the ones who've moved away, and you draw strength from their presence. Bill and his wife Audra, laughing and throwing confetti into the air. Bev, in her bridesmaid dress, linking arms with Ben. Richie and Eddie, inseparable and in love, although they won't admit it. Mike, smiling proudly as you walk down the aisle. Stan, murmuring *congratulations* against your cheek as he kisses you.

The rest of the day passes in a sweet blur and, other than a brief moment of awkwardness when you allow Junior to take you for a whirl around the dance floor, you feel completely happy, for the first time in your life.

Smug, like the cat that got the cream.

And later, Bob looks equally smug, when he finally has you on your back, naked beneath him.

You're a little nervous, despite your initial eagerness.

You're *terrified*, truth be told.

He takes the time to soothe you, to slick you up with his fingers and his mouth, and *oh*, you cum *forever* when he eats you out, your toes curling deliciously with each stroke of his tongue. He smirks up at you, his face framed by your quivering thighs, "You wanna return the favour, babydoll?"

You've never done this before, but you're willing to give it a shot, to please your husband.

Bob positions you on all fours, with your back arched and your ass tilted up, and then he drags his cock across your lips, sliding the thick head into your mouth. He twines his fingers into your hair, guiding you with gentle tugs.

“That’s good, baby.” He fucks into your throat, slowly at first, and then faster, until you’re struggling to breathe, “Mmm. Yeah, that’s *real* good, {y/n}. You sure this is your first time?” You shoot him a venomous glance and he chuckles, patting your cheek, “Just makin’ conversation, doll. Come on now, don’t quit on me. We’re just gettin’ started.”

He stops you before long, smiling ruefully, and then he rolls you beneath him, nudging your thighs apart with a sharp knee.

“Gonna pop your cherry, baby.” Bob murmurs hotly, filling his hands with your tits, his thumbs drawing slow circles over your nipples, “You ready for me? Yeah, I know you are, just hold still...”

You’re breathing hard, gripping at his shoulders, bracing yourself for the pain.

“Hey.” He presses a kiss against your mouth, “Look at me, baby.”

His cock glides between your folds, rubbing up against that sweet spot until you moan, and then dipping into your slick heat. You whimper around the stretch, your muscles burning, your hips grinding up to meet his shallow thrusts.

“Yeah. That’s it, doll. That’s my girl.”

He slams forward, with a loud grunt, suddenly filling you.

Splitting you open.

And then he’s hilted, balls-deep in your cunt.

You cry out, biting down upon his shoulder, and he slides most of the way out, smiling down at where your bodies are joined, flesh within flesh.

“I think that might be the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen, babydoll.”

Bob smirks, rolling his thumb across your clit, watching as your face sheens over with sweat, “Your blood on my cock. So *pretty*, baby. And you’re takin’ it like a champ, aren’t you? My good girl...”

He slides his hands beneath you, cupping your ass, holding your pelvis flush against his. Waiting for you to adjust to him, to the feeling of him inside of you.

After a moment, you’re grinding against him, quivering around his thickness and whining, like a horny bitch. The pain is still there, a deep fiery ache, but the pleasure is stronger now, and you’re *ready* for this, ready for him to fuck you into the mattress.

To claim you.

“Daddy, *please*...” You drag your fingernails across his back, rocking your hips up, “Please, I *need* it...”

Bob smiles, his fingers tightening around your buttocks, and then he moves against you, fucking you open with shallow thrusts. You press your burning face into his shoulder, not wanting him to see how messy you look, and he grinds his pubic bone hard against your clit, whispering sweet obscenities into the exposed curve of your throat.

“You’re so tight, babydoll. Mmm. Just wanna fill your sweet pussy, right here and now.”

The thought of him finishing inside of you sends a jolt of raw desire through your body.

Oh yes, you want him to do it.

You want him to fill you with cum, fill you with babies.

You want to smell like him, you want to feel his fluids leaking out of you, staining your panties and your thighs.

He ploughs into you, lathering your face with his tongue, “You ready for this, doll? You ready for my cum?”

You wrap your legs around his waist, sighing as your cunt flutters wildly, “Make me yours, Daddy...*oh*, shit!”

He rolls your clit beneath his thumb, pinching it between his fingers, and you topple over the edge, crying out in a hoarse voice that you barely recognise as your own.

“That’s it, sweet thing.” Bob grunts, fucking into you, clutching your limp body against his chest, “Oh, you’re gonna look so *beautiful*, baby. So *damn* beautiful, with your tits all heavy and fat, and a big ol’ belly. With my kid growing inside of you...”

You twitch beneath him, your mouth slack and your eyes misted over, “Y-yes...please...I want it...”

He obliges, erupting into you with a strangled roar, his fingertips sinking into your softness.

And then he rolls away, dragging you with him, and you curl against him with a contented purr, drifting off into a dreamless sleep.

The next morning, you slip out of bed and pull a robe over your nakedness, ducking out of the tent. It’s still early, not quite dawn, and the sky is rose-pink. There is a dew upon the grass beneath your feet, an earthy smell upon the air, beneath the familiar stench of the circus.

Your cunt is sore, your thighs tacky with cum and blood.

It’s perfect.

You light a cigarette, sighing as the smoke curls around you, and then a shadow moves, sliding around the side of the tent towards you. It’s Junior, already dressed, with a canvas-bag slung over his shoulder.

“Hey, wild-cat.”

You smile, dragging a hand through your rumpled hair, “Morning, brat.” Your eyes drift to the bag, “What’s with the pack?”

“I’m leaving.”

“What?” You stub your cigarette out, moving to stand before him, your hands grasping at his jacket, “Wait. Hold up. Don’t tell me this is because of me?”

He doesn't answer, his mouth twisting sullenly, but you know that you're right. He can barely look at you. His eyes drag along the ground, fixed upon your bare feet, and then he dares to raise his gaze, over your legs and up...

"Um..."

Suddenly flushed and faltering, he makes a vague gesture with his hands. You frown, not understanding, and then a breeze ripples across your exposed skin. The robe has slipped open, revealing your breasts and stomach.

"Oh, geez." Scowling, you wrap the damn thing closer around you, "Look, this is ridiculous. I don't want you to go. You're my best friend, Junior."

"I know. You're mine, too." He shakes his head, a melancholic smile pulling at his mouth, "But I have to get out of here for a while, or I'll go crazy. Believe me, it's for the best."

You let out a shuddering sigh, feeling tears welling in your eyes, "How long?"

"I don't know."

"Where will you go?"

"I don't know." Junior slides the pack from his shoulder, opening his arms to sweep you into a tight embrace. You snuffle against his chest and he murmurs your name, pressing a fierce kiss against the crown of your head, "Hey. Hey, don't cry, {y/n}. I hate it when you cry." He cups your face between his long hands, forcing you to look up at him. He brushes the tears from your cheeks, smiling reassuringly "I'll come back, someday."

"You promise?"

"Don't have much choice, do I?" He smirks, his green eyes drinking you in, "I can't stay away from you..."

And then he kisses you once, twice, his lips barely touching yours, and he pulls away, sliding the pack across his slender shoulders. He

spares you one last glance, winks at you, and then he is gone, striding away like a man on a mission, off to conquer the world.

You watch him go, blinking away tears, and then you slip into the tent, into bed, curling your body around Bob's warm frame. He stirs, murmuring your name, "Love you, baby."

You smile, molding yourself to the smooth curve of his back, "Love you too, Daddy."

8. May 1963

May 1963

Derry in spring, the town stretching out before you, like a flag of conquest.

You stand atop the crest of the hill, overlooking the Barrens, one hand resting upon the swell of your stomach. The child within kicks lustily against your touch, and you smile absently, rubbing your hand back and forth.

Small fingers clutch at the hem of your dress, pulling insistently, and a querulous voice pipes up, breaking through the heavy silence.

"I'm hungry, Mommy."

You roll your eyes, stooping to hoist your son up onto your hip, "You've got your father's appetite, that's for sure."

James Gray, your first-born son.

Light of your life.

Darling of the big-top.

Your little Jimmy-boy, three years old and already the master of your world, with his blue eyes and unruly curls. He rests his head upon your shoulder, huffing loudly, and you carry him back to the truck. Bob smirks down at you from behind the wheel, a cigar cocked in the corner of his mouth, at a jaunty angle. He reaches down and plucks the boy from your arms, setting him upon his lap.

You climb into the passenger seat, wincing as the dull ache around your pelvis grows sharper and more insistent. Bob cocks an eyebrow, placing a firm hand upon your bump, "You okay, babydoll?"

Grimacing, you manage a curt nod, "Yeah. I just can't seem to catch my breath, that's all."

He smiles, tapping his fingers upon the stretch of your stomach,

“Little one’s gettin’ ready to say hello, I reckon.”

“Not before we’ve set up camp, I hope.” You smile, your eyes gleaming beneath heavy lids, “Not after last time.”

You had given birth to Jimmy in the truck, pulled over at the side of the road, ten miles away from the Washington state-line. It had been touch and go for a while, but Bob had pulled you through the worst of it, murmuring words of encouragement and supporting your weight as you pushed your son into the world.

“Hang in there, wifey.”

Bob starts the engine, and the other vehicles in the convoy follow suit, and then you’re trundling down the road, heading into Derry once again.

Later that evening, once the tents have been raised and you’ve wrestled Jimmy into bed, you stretch out across Bob’s lap, like a lazy feline, and he plays your pregnant body like a fiddle, smirking as you clench and moan around his fingers.

The next morning, Bob heads out to oversee the rehearsals, taking Jimmy with him, and you enjoy a rare hour of quiet solitude, curled under the covers. You’ve already made plans to visit your parents later, and to meet with Bev and the others, but for now you’re content to doze, as the baby kicks against your ribs.

“Mommy.”

You groan with exasperation, cupping your stomach, and peer out of the covers, squinting through the harsh sunlight.

Jimmy is standing there, holding hands with a tall stranger, his little face bright and smiling.

“Mommy, this is my big brother.” The boy grins up at his companion, “He gave me a dime, Mommy. I’m gonna buy a toy, for the baby.”

Junior favours you with a guilty smile, “Sorry. Pop said that you’d be over here, but I didn’t realise that you were sleeping. I can come back later, if you want...”

Before he can say another word, you roll out of bed and into his arms, murmuring his name. Jimmy giggles, dancing on the spot, and Junior pulls away, looking down at the curve of your stomach. Seeking permission with his eyes, he brushes a hand across the swell, and the baby rolls beneath his touch.

He grins, sliding his hand up to touch your face, "I've missed you, wild-cat."

You sigh, burying your face against his chest, "Yeah, I've missed you too, brat."

Outside, a teenage boy saunters alongside his girlfriend, casually taking in the sights and sounds of the circus. He snorts, sliding an arm across her shoulders, "Ugh. What a freak-show."

You smirk, closing your eyes.

Oh, you don't know how right you are, kid.